

[Will Crittendon]

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Woody Phipps,

Phipps, Woody

Rangelore (negroe)

Tarrant Co., Dist. #7 Beliefs and Customs - Occupational lore [125?]

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Will Crittendon, 69, was born on his father's stock farm at Cedar Grove, Tex. He learned to ride a horse at an early age, and herded cattle at six. When he was nine, A.E. Rowe, cattleman, employed Will as a cowboy to assist in driving a herd from Wills Point Texas, to his [ire?] Ranch, near Paducah, Tex. Will finished the drive, then returned home, where he again herded for his father. When he was 15, Will got 50 mules together and left home to trade in stock. He became a roving gambler until he went to selling whiskey to the Indians. An Indian coup put him out of business, and he went to Fort Worth, where he's been ever since, and now resides at 1611 Stevenson St. Ft. Worth, Tex. His story:

"Does I know anything about do range? Why, man! I made a trail drive right through Fort worth heah when it wasn't even a whistle-stop, and I wasn't but nine yeahs old! I learned to ride a hoss on my pap's stock farm at Cedar Grove, Texas, whar I was born. I was born on Dec. 12, 1868, right after pap come to Texas from Alabama, whar he was de slave of Gov'nor Crittendon.

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"'Twas while he was a slave dat he gits his love of good hoss flesh right from de gov'nor. De gov'nor always has him a good surrey team, and used pap to drive it. When freedom come, one of de gov'nor's sons had done larned pap to [readd'n?]' write, so pap come to Texas to start him a hoss ranch and git hisself a school to teach. He done alright about de school, gittin' one at Cedar Grove, and he was de first teacher in de county at dat time. 'Bout de hoss ranch, he didn't do so well. He only got around 20-30 head at a time, and 40-100 cattle critters at a time. De range an fo' de times when he buys and sells.

"While he am teachin, school, I larned to ride a hoss and I rode herd on all his critters. I shore hankered some to be a cow puncher, and 'twarnt no trouble to git me out and a-working de critters over. C. 12 - 2/11/41 [Tex?] Box 1 2 'Twarnt no fencin' dem days, and de critters all run ever'whar just as if 'twas a big ranch wid all de critters b'longin' to de same man.

"De roundups and all was handled de same as if 'twas all b'longin' to de same man. All de ranchers gathered together in de Spring, 'long in March, and we'd all roundup every critter in sight dat wasn't under fence. When de different cowboy crews herded their critters all to'ards de 'munity roundup grounds, and all de critters got together, den de cowboys'd go to cuttin' out de stuff as was wanted to brand.

"De reg'lar cowboys wouldn't let me cut out, but I'd git to run de brandin' iron after de critters was throwed and tied. Dat was my reg'lar job at de roundups, 'Brand man'. I'd watch de cutters circle through de herd, chase a cow out, rope it, den throw it, and I'd be on de job wid de irons befo' I was called for. If 'twas de Fall roundup which was held 'long in Late Fall, Den de fat critters was herded off to themselves. I'd haze 'em to de sale herd after using de iron [sois?] de boys could git back on de job quicker.

"Dat's de way 'twas after I was over five 'til I was 'bout nine. De Fall roundup when I was nine, found a man from a West Texas Ranch dat wanted to buy all de salable stuff, so all de ranchers 'greed to sell. Well, after de herd was cut out and worked over, he didn't have

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enough men to drive de herd back. I wanted to go, so after pap 'greed to let me, I signed up. De man's name was Alfred E. Rowe, and de Wire Ranch at Paducah, Texas, was whar we was headed wid de trail herd. 3 "I'll never forget how my mammy ganged around me and cried 'bout me goin' off wid de herd. I kept telling her dat I wasn't goin' to stay, but she didn't feel none so good anyway. I finally broke away from her, and went to tell pap goodbye. He didn't smile none, but said, 'Well, son. You wanted to get out, now be a man where ever you go and you'll always end up right by doin' so.'

"After de herd got started, I forgot all about my folks and went to riding herd. We had a couple of stomps before we got 50 miles away. One of 'em was when a hoss stumbled in de night as de rider got real close to de herd. De noise made by de saddle started 'em off, and I thought we'd never get 'em stopped. I'd never been in a stomp before, and was some skittish but tried not to let on like I was.

"When de stomps was on, I got real busy around de remuda and kept de hosses quiet while de other cow pokes was busy a-trying to stop de stomp. Dat was a good job 'cause if de hosses went too, de cow pokes wouldn't have nothin' to gather de critters up again wid. 'Twas always important to watch de saddle stock so's not to be left afoot, and I sure didn't like walkin' none atall.

"I reckon de real startin' place of de trail drive was at Muddy Cedar Creek. A place about half way between Mills Point and Elmer. Dat's whar we burnt de 'Turkey Track' brand on de critters. 'Twas de same brand Rowe used on his Wire Ranch. After we got started, we worked on and on, and finally reached Fort Worth. On account of we done so much work and all, I don't recall how many days we was on de road 'til we got to Fort Worth. We drove de hard right through some of what's now de business 4 deestric 'long about whar 12th and 14th streets am now. De herd kinda went West of de fort, which was whar de Crim'nal Cou't buildin' am now.

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"When we got down to de river, I most nigh lost a hoss 'cause I'd never swum a river before. Since de Trinity River was up in de Fall Rise, de place whar folks usually walked critters acrost was over a hoss's head. De trail boss had de chuck wagon floated acrost by tying logs onto de wheels and under de wagon bed, den had sev'al cow pokes git acrost and pull on ropes while we got de wagon started out on dis side. One of de cow pokes's hoss on de pullin' end got kinda bogged up, and like to a fell but he made it, and de wagon swung out into de stream. As de wagon went down stream, de boys pulled into shore, and after de wagon struck gravel on de other side, de boys untied de ropes, hitched onto their hosses an' drug de wagon right out.

"De critters in de lead of de herd sees de wagon stock an' hosses on de other side, an' 'twarnt so hard to git 'em to take to de water. After de leads took de water, we boys all hollered an' slapped our hats ag'inst de critter's side 'til dey got to crossin'. After 'bout half de herd was over, I 'cided 'twas time fo' me to go. I rides my hoss right out into de water an' he swelled his sides to go to swimmin', but he couldn't swell 'cause I'd forgot to loosen de saddle strops. I shore like to a lost dat hoss before it could git back to walking ground. One of de rannies comes over to me an' says, ' Say, Nigger! Don't you know to loosen your saddle strops?'

"I loosened de strops an' after two-three tries, I got my hoss to take de water again an' we went on acrost. Dat was a 5 good lesson for me 'cause I come to many a river after dat, an' 'memberin' how big dat hoss swelled, I always loosened de strops. Did you ever watch a hoss when he starts a-swimming? Watch one some time an' see how big his tummy swells.

"Well, we gits acrost an' drove on. After crossin' sev'al more rivers an' some hills, we finally to de Wire Ranch at Paducah. After seein' de critters spread out on de ranch, I got my money and started home. On de way, I just had me a good time. Wasn't a-scared of

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Indians none a-tall 'cause my folks taught me dat de Indians wouldn't bother a nigger. An' dat's right too, 'cause I dealt wid 'em later on an' they never hurt me.

"I follered de trail back dat we used to drive de critters up wid, an' all de way, I'd study de places we passed an' I didn't have no time to stop an' look at. I recall now how de reeds an' weeds at one crossin' was still de same as when we fixed de place. You see, we'd come to quick sand, an' made a crossin' by throwing a lot of weeds and reeds into de place, den riding de hosses back an' forth 'til we had a solid crossin'.

"Another place was where 'twas a long way 'twix water holes, and de critters all got dry and thirsty. I don't recollect how many miles 'twas, but when de critters first smelt de water, day stompeded for miles to git to de water. '[Twanat?] no beef lost in dis stomp 'cause de first critters was so far in advance of de drag dat dey had drunk and gone aside to rest in de shade while de drags drunk.

"After I got back home, de folks throwed a party for me. We all had a good time, den I settled down to be de world's best 6 hoss buster, if I could. I rode ever hoss I could git a chanst at. One thing I want you all to record, am, dat I've never been throwed from a hoss at no time. Of course, an' you can ast any hoss wrangler 'bout it an' he'll tell you de same, dat some hosses wont bust. You can ride 'em an' ride 'em, ride 'em 'til day aint got de spirit to lift their head. Still, after they've had a chanst to rest, they're as wild as ever. I never had much truck wid sich goin's on. When I couldn't bust a hoss, an' I knew nobody else could, I'd shoot him in de head an' go off an' leave him lay. 'Twas a reg'lar custom 'mong hoss wrangle to shoot 'em when dey couldn't be busted, 'less some rodeo would use him for pitching shows.

"I got to gittin' together all de hosses I could so's I could sell 'em. When de cow pokes an' me warnt bust wid pap's stuff, we'd go to de hills an' way-lay a hoss herd. These wild hosses all had one stud for a leader. He was de only stud in de herd, an' acted like a rooster does around chickens. Dat is, he'd lead 'em to water, an' feed, an' keep jiggers on

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danger. Any hoss hunter will tell you dat it's mighty nigh impossible to slip up on a herd before de stud gives de warning neigh.

“De only chanst a hoss wrangler had of catching wild hosses was in running 'em 'til dey was all tired out, den driving 'em into a hoss trap. For dat job, we cow pokes all took as many extra hosses as we could wrangle and still take care of de catching job. Knowing dat de wild hoss herd runs in a circle so's not to get far away from his stomping ground, we'd station our hosses in three bunches in a circle around where we figured de herd'd run. 7

“De hoss trap was made in a blind canyon. A canyon dat had two walls, and an' end where de hosses couldn't git out by jumpin' an' climbin'. At de front of de trap, we'd put a bunch of poles an' posts at de side so's de hosses wouldn't notice dem on de way in, an' after dey was in, we'd hurry an' fix a corral fence higher dan we figured dey'd jump.

“Since I was sich a good shot, I was always stationed right at de corral fence soon's de herd went in. When de lead stud founf out dat he couldn't get out at de end, he'd turn out to go back, an' he'd call de mares to foller him, which dey always done widout even looking around when in a tight place. Dey just follered him. Since de lead stud was always de best hoss in de bunch, he could sometimes jump de fence. When he come over, he'd seem to float, or soar, over. “Twas always an easy thing for me to crease 'em as dey come over.

“I'd crease him an' all dat follered him, den we'd hurry an' tie 'em all up before dey'd come to. After dey was tied up, we'd untie one at a time an' ride him 'til he was rode down. We'd have a rodeo all by our selves, an' 'twas worthwhile 'cause de wildest hosses buck de most. Reason it out, an' you'll see. After ridin' de roped ones, we'd ride inside an' snake one out, ride him, den go git another.

“I got me quite a reputation as a hoss buster around in those parts, an cattlemen from all around would come to me wid de hosses dey couldn't bust. I'd bust 'em at so much per hoss, an' when I couldn't bust 'em, I'd shoot 'em.

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"When I got to be 15, I'd got me 50 mules together, so I set out to make my fortune. I traded these mules around, an' 8 an' busted hosses on de side. Among de places I busted hosses was de Tom King Ranch at Greenville, Texas. Tom King had thousands of critters, how many I don't know. Jim Harris, a banker at Terrell, Texas, had a ranch in West Texas, but bought his hosses at Terrell, an' always had me bust 'em for him. Charlie Harris, his brother, run the 'CH' on the Saline River wid about 4,000 head, an' I busted his hosses for him too. De ones his boys couldn't bust. Jim Lancey, at Wills Point, had me bust a few for him from time to time, and Anderson dat run de 'JIM' brand at Egypt, Texas, had me bust all his hosses. He was a cattle dealer and bought an' sold from one to 2,000 head at a time.

"De Manning Hoss Ranch had me bust all de hosses for him. his place was clost to Terrell, an' I'd contract to bust 40 at a time. Many's de time I'd have de money gambled off before I'd busted half of what I'd contracted for. 'Twas on dis place dat I roped something I didn't want. I was riding along one day, a-twirling my rope, when a panther walked right out in front of me. Well, I'd had sev'al bears come up to my camp fire, a-smelling my frying bacon, and I'd shot him over. I'd had sev'al close places, and my rope had brought me out of it, so I just lassoed de panther. Lawd! Lawd! After I'd done roped him, I saw what a big mistake I'd made 'cause he turned and started to'ards me. Dey was a big post by his path, an' he leapt on it so's to make his jump down on me. Well, I was quick on de draw, an' a straight shot, so I just up and shot mister panther. Don't you believe dat I couldn't shoot straight, either, 'cause I can still shoot straight and fast today. My years haven't slowed my hand, nor dimmed my eyes. I know day all de old duffers like to sit around 9 and tell what all dey done, but I can still do mine. You see dat calendar on de wall? It's about 30 feet, aint it? 'n' de light's dim, aint it? Well, if you'll go up close, you'll see dat de purtty gal aint got no teeth, an' you'll see dat de lips aint tetched. I shot dat in last night, and all of these boys here will tell you I done so. I aint given up to going around and shooting but dey kidded me so much dat I brought my sixer over and showed 'em what an old duffer

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can do. Up 'til last year, I run a bunch of hounds out at Lake North, and had bankers and business men for customers dat wanted a good shot an' some good hounds in de party.

“De last man I worked for busting hosses, was Lindsey, at Elmo, Texas. He was a big hoss man, an' run a reg'lar hoss ranch. He'd got a big order for so many head of hosses, an' I was hired to round 'em up for him. Well, I rounded his hosses up for him, but I cut back a few for myself, and after de sale was made, I went back and got de stuff I'd cut out, an' took it to Abilene, Texas, where I sold it.

“While in Abilene, I run into a fellow name of Jim Sullivan. He wanted to sell whiskey to de Indians, an bein's I was game for anything, I took him on. 'Twas long in 1900 dat we set our whiskey wagon on Chocotaw Creek, at Savoy, Texas. We kept de wagon hid, an' went acrost into de Territory to make our deals. No matter how good or sorry a hoss, 'twas one quart per hoss. We got some fine hoss flesh, too. Indians'd trade their souls for a little 'Fire water.' We just got along fine on our first trip, an' made a pocket full of money out of de hosses. 10 “On our second trip, we hired a man to go with us an' watch de wagon whilst both of us got out an' made deals. Some way or other, de Indians'd got together, an' was waiting' for Jim and me to show with the whiskey wagon. After pitching our spot, I made off to a tribe I knew of. Before I got over de hill away from de wagon, I heard shots. De Indians'd come over on de Texas side, an' was shootin' up de wagon. I rode back as fast as I could, but when I got clost, I saw dat Jim and de other fellow was dead, an' de Indians was lifting de whiskey out of de wagon to load it on their hosses. One of them saw me a-coming, an' shot at me. De bullet passed through my right leg, an' killed my hoss. After dey saw 'twas a nigger a-coming, dey left me alone. I got Jim's hoss an' rode on away. [fter?] I got to a town, I got took care of, den come to Fort Worth, and aint been away since.